



Report of the Norden Division (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden)

Gammeltoft, Peder

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**11th United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 8 -17 August 2017

Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports on the work of the United Nations Group of Experts
on Geographical Names, its divisions, working groups and
task teams since the Tenth Conference**

**Report of the Norden Division
(Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden)**

Submitted by the Norden Division **

* E/CONF.105/1

** Prepared by Peder Gammeltoft (Denmark), Chair, Norden Division

Resolutions concerned:

I/4, I/8, II/4, II/28, II/29,
III/5, III/17, III/20, V/13,
VIII/1, X/4, IX/4, IX/5

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I. Divisional meetings

Since the 29th Session in Bangkok 2016, the Norden Division has held two meetings. The first meeting took place on April 28th 2016 in connection with the 29th UNGEGN Session. The second division meeting took place at Oslo Gardermoen Airport on March 24th 2017 as part of the preparation for the joint 11th UNCISG Conference and the 30th UNGEGN Session. The next Division meeting will take place on August 8th 2017 at the 11th UNCISG Conference, in Room CR-C, 1:15pm-2:45pm.

There were 5 persons present at the 2016 Norden Division meeting, where the Norden Division homepage was discussed and an update was given on ELF (European Location Framework), INSPIRE and EGN (EuroGeoNames). At the 2017 division meeting in Oslo, there were 11 persons present and items such as preparations for the 11th UNCISG Conference/30th UNGEGN Session, the future relationship UNGEGN - UN-GGIM, news from ELF, INSPIRE and EGN and news from the Norden Division area, including the Division homepage, were discussed. The main point, however, was the business of the change of Chair from Denmark to Norway (see Item IV below). For more information on the 2016 and 2017 Minutes, please see the [Norden Division Meetings page](#).

II. Norden Division homepage

The Norden Division has had its own homepage since 2008: <http://nordendivision.nfi.ku.dk/>. In 2017, there has been a minor revision of some of the subpages of the homepage in order to reflect current state of affairs in the Norden Division and among division countries. The homepage fulfils its aim in presenting concise and up-to-date information about UNGEGN and the Norden Division.

III. Joint Norden Division project

As reported in previous Norden Division Reports, geographical names used by indigenous and minority language groups are standardized, maintained and disseminated at a national level even though these groups as entities are often transnational. To remedy this, the Norden Division is considering producing an online web-service based resource for these geographical names of the Norden Division area, although no final decision in the matter has been made. However, with the release of official or nationally standardized NMA geographical names in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden through web-services, this possibility has become increasingly feasible.

IV. Change of Norden Division Chairmanship

Denmark, with Peder Gammeltoft as its chair, has held the Norden Division chairmanship in two periods, and feels that it is now time to let the chairmanship be administered by another division member. With the decision of The Norwegian Language Council (*Språkrådet*) to take on the chairmanship responsibilities, the Norden Division will change chair on 8th August 2017 at the Norden Division Meeting at the 11th UNCISG Conference (see Item I above). The new Norden Division chair will be Ingvil Nordland of The Norwegian Language Council. In order to aid the smooth transition of chairmanship, Peder Gammeltoft will be the new division secretary and will maintain the Norden Division homepage.

V. Geographical name legislation and geographical name usage within the Norden Division area

Denmark:

Legislation, registration, administration and standardization of geographical names

With the new Law on Geographic Information in 2017, provisions are being made for a departmental order or law, which specifies the requirements for the registration, standardization and management of geographical names in Denmark.

In connection with improving coherence in the registration of Danish geographical names and strengthening the administrative uses of geographical names, the requirements necessary for the standardization and authorization of the 130,000 geographical names in the NMA geographical names register are being investigated. The ambition is to have register standardized, with as few exceptions as possible.

The Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency has established an online portal, Danske Stednavne (Danish geographical names), for registering new geographical names and cross-authority administration of existing named features. All e-registered geographical names are subsequently processed by the agency in relation to relevance, categorization and location before they are established in the portal. In addition, the agency offers its geographical names data in different web services, where users can freely retrieve geographical names data.

In 2013, the Danish Government, Danish Regions and Local Government Denmark decided to create better coherence in data concerning citizens, businesses, real estate, buildings, addresses and geographical names, etc. (Basic Data) to support efficiency and growth in the public and private sectors. It provides new opportunities for using geographical names to search information across public records and official registers. The Basic Data Program has increased the use of geographical names for administrative purposes and data management by the Danish administration, citizens and private enterprises.

Finland:

Legislation

In January 2014, the working group on clear administrative language, appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, published a plan of action to improve the language of authorities (Hyvän virkakielen toimintaohjelma, 'Action Plan for Clear Administrative Language'). As one concrete proposal concerning the communication of the authorities, the plan of action includes a suggestion an Act on Place Names to clarify the usage of traditional geographical names and the planning of new official names.

Norway:

Legislation

The Norwegian Place-Names Act of 1990, with amendments of 2006, was revised again in July 2015. The Norwegian Mapping Authority is responsible for implementing the Act and decides the spelling of the vast majority of traditional geographical names in Norway. The revised Act helps to clarify the responsibilities between the municipalities and the Mapping Authority. The most significant change in the 2015 Act concerned the spelling of names on smallholdings. With the latest amendment, the owner of a smallholding has the right to decide the spelling of the geographical name of his or her property as long as documentation of such spelling can be obtained. Since July 2015, 253 names of single holdings have been determined. Out of them, the owner decided the spelling of 73 names. The revised Act has led to fewer cases than expected.

Geographical names and linguistic minorities

Although the Place-Name Act and the Saami Act have been in force for over 20 years, their implementation is lacking on several levels. One positive development has been in representing Saami geographical names on road signs. The Norwegian Road Commission has decided that Saami geographical names will be on existing road signs and when new road signs are being put up.

Geographical Names Register

Sentralt Stedsnavnregister (The Central Place-Names Register), which was founded on the Place-Names Act and administered by the Mapping Authority, contains the approved forms of geographical names in accordance with the Place-Names Act. The register currently contains 996,000 geographical names with 1,178,000 spellings of 975,000 named places. About 105 000 spellings are determined by law.

The Place-Names Register was renewed and put into production 2016, as reported in the last division report.

Sweden:

Geographical names legislation

The Swedish Historic Environment Act (Sw. Kulturmiljölagen) was revised in 2000 and 2013. Since 2000 it has included a paragraph advocating "good place-name practice" in central, regional and local government. Emphasis is on the importance of preserving geographical names as a part of the nation's cultural heritage. In the latest amendment to the Act, the geographical names of one of the five national minority languages, Meänkieli, were additionally strengthened and must now be used along with the Swedish, Saami and Finnish names on maps and on signs in multilingual areas.

The 2013 amendment also strengthened the normative role of Lantmäteriet in the standardization of geographical names.

Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

Sweden ratified the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH, 2003) in January 2011. The Swedish Government has assigned the implementation of the Convention to the Institute for Language and Folklore. Good geographical name practice includes preserving established geographical names in their correct linguistic forms as long as the group of name-users acknowledge them.

The Geographical Names Network

As reported in the last division report, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs set up the Geographical Names Network (Sw. Namnvårdsgruppen) in 2013. The purpose of this group of experts is to raise awareness and gain knowledge about how best to standardize foreign names of countries and other important geographical places outside of Sweden. The group shall provide guidance on matters of principle, as well as develop Swedish terminology, promote good geographical name practice, and make recommendations on individual name issues.

VI. Norden Division activities in UNGEGN

Norden Division members are very active in UNGEGN, not only holding three Working Group Convenorships, but also giving several Working Papers at the 10. UNCSGN Conference/31. UNGEGN Session, including under Agenda Items:

- 4. Reflections on the past, present and future
 - *Report of the history of the Norden Division* (Norway)
- 5. Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Tenth Conference
 - *Report of Denmark* (Denmark)

- *Report of Finland* (Finland)
- *Report of Norway* (Norway)
- *Report of Sweden* (Sweden)
- 6. Reports of the Divisions, Working Groups and Task Teams:
 - *Report of the Norden Division* (Norden Division).
- 7. National and international meetings, conferences, symposiums, publicity and publications.
 - *Report of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding* (Denmark).
 - *Working Paper by the Liasons Officer for ICOS*.
- 9.b. National standardization – Office treatment of names
 - *An Online Service for Settlement Names in Finland* (Finland)
 - *Working Paper on the new version of God ortnamnssed (Good Place-Name Practice)* (Sweden)
- 9.d. National standardization – Administrative structure of national names authorities, legislation, policies and procedures
 - *Working Paper on the new Swedish National Names Network* (Sweden)
- 9.e. National standardization – Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use:
 - *Update of Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors* (Denmark).
 - *Update of Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors* (Finland).
- 10: Activities relating to the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage
 - *Report of the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage* (Sweden)
- 13: Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology
 - *Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology* (Sweden).

VII. Geographical names news in the Norden Division area

Denmark:

Digitization of geographical names archives

The Name Research Section at the University of Copenhagen has long been focused on digitizing its geographical names records, in order to establish new platforms for onomastic research and administration name records. The section's research portal *Danmarks Stednavne* (<http://danmarksstednavne.navneforskning.ku.dk/>) was launched in 2012 and contains 210,000 geographical names, their interpretation and historical forms. In addition, provision has been made to digitize all the main paper-slip archives of the Name Research Section in 2017, in total 1.6 million documents. This material will, like the existing research portal, be made available for open use and form part of the section's digital name research resources.

Finland:

Digitization of geographical names archives

The digitalisation of the names collection (Names Archive) of the Institute for the languages of Finland is going on. The project aims to convert all of the archive's geographical name cards, data capture maps and the attributes and metadata related to them into digital format. Objective is to open the digital archive at the end of year 2017.

An Online Service for Settlement Names in Finland

The index of inhabited places in Finland was released free-of-charge (<http://kaino.kotus.fi/asutusnimihakemisto/>) in December 2016. The index contains over 20 000 names of Finnish towns, villages and other inhabited places with information of not only the name forms but also their inflection and correctly derived inhabitant name forms.

Meetings

The Swedish language name consultant at the Institute for the Languages of Finland regularly partakes in the meetings of the Swedish Geographical Names Network (see under Item V.), since the establishment of the network.

Norway:

Geographical Names Archives and Consultancies

The University of Oslo decided to discontinue the Language Archives and the associated Name Archives and its Place-Name Research Group in 2015. In 2016, the archives were relocated to the University of Bergen, albeit with less academic and financial resources. It is still unknown if the relocation of the Language Archives will result in a vitalisation of the Name Research environment of Norway.

Geographical names and linguistic minorities

A white paper on the Saami language, *Hjertespråket - Forslag til lovverk, tiltak og ordninger for Saamiske språk*, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/nou-2016-18/id2515222/>. Among other things, the white paper discusses the safeguarding and use of Saami geographical names.

Meetings

The Mapping Authority and the Place-Names Consultancies/Norwegian Language Council assemble yearly to discuss legal, professional and organizational matters regarding the standardization of geographical names. There are approximately 30 participants at these meetings. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs has been represented on the meetings in 2014 and 2016. The revision of the Place-Name Act and its guidelines has been the most important discussion point at these meetings over the past five years.

The Norwegian Names Association (Norsk namnelag) held its general assembly on 15th November 2016, combined with a conference focusing on the revised Place-Name Act. The next meeting is planned for 2018.

Sweden:

A revised guide to name standardization

The booklet *God ortnamnssed* (Good place-name practice) was first publicized by Lantmäteriet in 2001, in a publication series from Lantmäteriet. Each issue covers a specific topic within the field of geographical names, name care and name standardization. A revised edition of the guide was published in 2016 (84 pp., in Swedish only), incorporating the latest developments in geographical names standardization in Sweden.

Discouraging commercialization of geographical names

In the work with implementing the UNGEGN resolution X/4 Discouraging the commercialization of geographical names, the Place-Name Advisory Board is working on a set of recommendations to discourage the commercialization of geographical names and counter the creation and use of geographical names for commercial purposes.

Changes to the administrative divisions of Sweden under way

A government committee will in August 2017 propose new first-level subdivisions which should result in Sweden being divided into substantially fewer counties. The governmental investigation will be basing its findings on a number of parameters, such as the needs of citizens and businesses, including transportation, labour, health care, education, culture and a healthy environment. The aim is to create an appropriate subdivision and effective organizations that causes permanent benefits including a better adaptation to demographic, nutritional, geographical and environmental conditions. The Institute for Language and Folklore and Lantmäteriet has pointed out the need for good geographical name practice in the Committee's work.